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The Spirit speaks to the  
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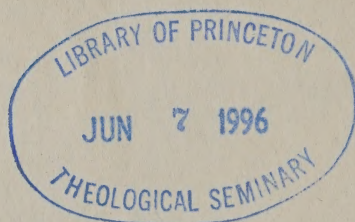
# THE SPIRIT SPEAKS TO THE CHURCH

Guide to the Study of The Acts by George L. Hunt





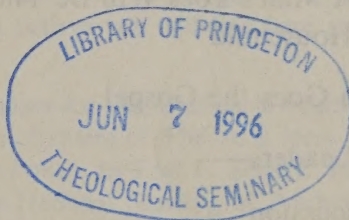
**"You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses." — Acts 1:8**



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# THE SPIRIT SPEAKS TO THE CHURCH

A GUIDE prepared especially for individual and group study of the Bible for members, circles, or groups of Women's Organizations of the United Presbyterian Church N. A. and of the Presbyterian Church U.S.A.—after June, 1958, The United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America.



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## FOREWORD

Let us be frank with one another. As you pick up this study of the book of The Acts, you are getting into the most difficult kind of Bible study I know anything about. Not that The Acts is an unusually difficult book. In many ways it is one of the easiest books in the New Testament for group study. But how much time will you have for Bible study in your circle or group this year? Stop right now and add it up. Four hours? More? Less? Can you study these nineteen chapters of The Acts adequately in the time you have?

The persons who asked me to prepare this study recognized that you would have a limited amount of time in groups to confront The Acts and let God speak to you from its pages. They therefore followed a suggestion made by many women throughout the church and instructed me to suggest passages for home study and to prepare this Guide on the basis that advance study and preparation would be done at home before each meeting of the circle. If you can do this, you can give more time to intensive Bible study in the circle or group meeting.

Another solution of the problem was the decision to limit the study this year to *Acts, chs. 10 to 28*. Although *Acts, chs. 1 to 9*, are among the most exciting and provocative chapters in the book, I have found in the remaining chapters thrilling testimony to the power of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church and I believe you will find here ample material for a study of this subject.

There were two other reasons for the decision to begin this year's study at *Acts, ch. 10*. The earlier chapters of The Acts were studied in 1950, with the guide *Clothed with Power*, by Earl F. Zeigler. They were also the basis for Bible study at the National Meeting of Presbyterian Women at Purdue in the summer of 1958; and this circle study can be a follow-up of Purdue in many women's groups. (We will get an "over-view" of *Acts, chs. 1 to 9*, in the first chapter of this Guide.)

There is a third solution to this problem of time, but one which I hope none of you will use. That is to have someone lecture for a half hour or more on the assigned passages. This is the lazy way, and it is not really study. If you are going to *study* the Bible, *you* will have to study the Bible. No one else can do it for you. Let me therefore say something about the method of Bible study being followed in this Guide, and your part in it.

The method of Bible study recommended here is *group discussion*, on the basis that group members will read the assigned Scripture before coming to the group or circle meeting. The skill required of leaders is not

the knowledge that a Bible expert would have but the ability to help a group think through the issues raised by the Word of God. The group member is as responsible for the success of this Bible study as the group leader. Having this Guide on hand for her preparation, the leader should think about the issues before the meeting as well as study the Scripture in advance.

At the back of this Guide is a section called "Suggestions to Leaders." It contains a few suggestions about discussion, some additional resources, and guidance for each of the ten discussions. Some circles and groups will have one leader carry through on the Bible study all year. Others change the Bible leadership each meeting. Whichever you do, be sure every discussion leader reads the first chapter of this Guide, the subsection at the back "About Discussion," and some of the early discussion plans.

Many churches have training classes for Bible study leaders. This is an excellent idea. I would suggest most strongly, however, that this training be not only on the Bible material itself but also on the issues raised by the Scripture. The leader will need as much help here for her circle discussion as in understanding the passage itself.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Each chapter of this Guide uses certain terms that need to be defined:

**For Background Study** refers to the larger block of Scripture that will be read in preparation for the meeting. The arrangement of the material provides that all of The Acts will be read during the course of the study, although the circle or study group will concentrate on the passage that brings out the central teaching of the assigned chapters.

**For Circle or Group Study** refers to the verses that will be the basis for discussion in Women's Association circles and other groups that may use this Guide.

**For Home Study** is an arrangement of the background Scripture into manageable portions for daily reading. There are usually about seven of these with each study. They could be read each day in the week preceding the circle or group meeting or daily in the longer period between circle meetings.

**The Situation and The Issues Arising from This Study** are described in the first chapter of this Guide.



## ABBREVIATED PATTERN

Some groups may plan to spend fewer than ten meetings on the study of The Acts. Where this is the case, we recommend that the chapters of the Guide be selected and combined as follows:

### For Six Meetings:

1. Chapter I
2. Chapter III
3. Chapters IV and X
4. Chapter V
5. Chapters VI and VII
6. Chapter VIII

### For Four Meetings:

1. Chapters I and III
  2. Chapters IV and X
  3. Chapter V
  4. Chapters VI and VIII
- 

It is inappropriate to dedicate a publication of this sort; but if I were to inscribe it, it would be to our third child and first daughter, Marcia Beth, who arrived at our home while the material was being frantically written to beat her deadline—and she won.

GEORGE L. HUNT\*

*Havertown, Pa.*

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# CHAPTER I

## *The Promise of the Spirit*

**For Background Study: Acts, chs. 1 to 9**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 1:1-11**

**Notes for Leaders: pages 48-51**

### **THE GOD WHO ACTS<sup>1</sup>**

The whole Bible is a book of “acts”—the record of the acts of God. G. Ernest Wright has described the Biblical view of God as “the God who acts.” Our God is not known in wise sayings or in carefully reasoned proofs for his existence but by events in which he acts.

The creation of man is an act; the beginning of sin is presented as a concrete event rather than as an idea. God enters into a specific relationship with a particular man, Abraham, and a particular people, Israel. He saves them by acting in their behalf: by deliverance from Egypt, and at the Red Sea. He gives his commandments at a particular time and place. He comes to redeem mankind in the birth of a child by a real mother. Redemption is accomplished by a concrete act: the crucifixion and resurrection. The Bible is not a theologian’s book about God but a believer’s testimony of the ways he has met God-in-action.

The book of The Acts describes God’s coming and God’s acting through the Holy Spirit. God comes to his church, and we answer his coming either by receiving the Spirit or by rejecting him. We shall see people doing both in our study of The Acts.

### **THE STRANGE, NEW WORLD**

When we begin to read The Acts thoughtfully and imaginatively, we find ourselves in a strange, new world, unlike any world we know. In one of

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<sup>1</sup> The arrangement of this first session’s material is different from that of the other nine for two reasons: we need an introduction to the book of The Acts; and in many groups and circles the members will probably not have this Guide for home use until after the first meeting.

C. S. Lewis' fantasies for children he has his leading characters step through a large wardrobe closet of an old English manor house into a mysterious world where animals talk and where good and evil engage in actual combat. The Acts gives us this same sense of stepping out of this world into another, the world of the Holy Spirit. We know that there was as much sin in this church and in this world as in any world or church we know; but it is not Luke's purpose to tell us about this. He wants his readers to know what the Holy Spirit can do with those persons who become bound to him. Therefore, the Holy Spirit is the chief "act-or" in the acts of The Acts, and all others play roles subordinate to his role in the drama.

E. F. Scott gives a good picture of the stained-glass world of The Acts, the world of the Holy Spirit's work. "The truth is that the men who made the church were unconscious of what they were doing. They acted from no design but were swept on by movements of the Spirit which they never tried to understand. They lived in a spiritual world which was more real to them than the material one, and it was in this period of ecstasy that the church took shape. The initial fervor wore off, and the effort was then made to define the Christian beliefs, regulate the customs, and devise plans and methods for the mission. In this task the church has been engaged ever since. But at the outset all was done by the Spirit, and this first period was decisive for all the later history. While it was still a little group of visionaries, waiting from hour to hour for the Lord's coming, the church assumed its essential character. All that came afterward in the growth of Christian ideas and institutions was only the development of what was given spontaneously in those earliest days."<sup>2</sup>

We cannot transplant the life in The Acts to our world today because Christian witness is always witness to a specific situation, at a specific moment in time, with specific people involved in the action. Our setting in history is different from their setting; our problems are not the same.

But we have one thing in common with the apostolic church, and this justifies our study of The Acts. We have in common with the apostles *the power of the Holy Spirit*. He is at work in our church as he was also at work in their church. The Father has sent him to work in us the same as he worked in Peter, Paul, Barnabas, and all the rest. We are placed in the church at his call, there to receive his promised power.

We study the book of The Acts *in order to learn what the Holy Spirit did then, so that we might be open to his leading now.*

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<sup>2</sup> Ernest F. Scott, "The Beginnings," in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 7, p. 178. Abingdon Press. Used by permission.



## THE AUTHOR'S PURPOSES

G. H. C. MacGregor, in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Vol. 9), suggests that the author of The Acts (Luke) had four aims in mind when he composed this book. We will understand The Acts better if we look for evidence of these aims in the course of our study.

“(a) A historical aim—to describe the expansion of Christianity in widening circles, from Jerusalem to Rome.

“(b) A religious aim—to demonstrate the power of the Spirit in the work of the apostles.

“(c) An apologetic aim—to commend the Pauline mission and to minimize the divisions within the Christian community.

“(d) A political aim—to commend the Christian church to the contemporary Roman authorities.”<sup>3</sup>

## THE SITUATION AND THE ISSUES

Our study of The Acts will follow a simple pattern. In the first section of each chapter we shall sketch *the situation* described in the chapters under consideration, emphasizing what seems to be the main teaching of the passage. In the next section we shall suggest portions of the background reading from the Bible *for home study*, so that members of the circle or group might come prepared to see the particular passage for group study in its proper setting. The third section will concentrate on a selection of verses from the background reading; and here the emphasis will be upon the *issues* raised by the passage.

We do not study the Bible correctly by drawing neat morals from an ancient situation. We study the situation from the past in order to learn how the Holy Spirit spoke to believers then, in the hope and expectation that we can hear him speak to us in our situation today.

## BEGINNING THE STUDY

### THE SITUATION IN *Acts*, chs. 1 to 9

The author of The Acts is Luke, the same man who wrote the Third Gospel. The Acts is the second of his two books, both written for his friend Theophilus. We suppose Luke wrote from Rome, and although we cannot be certain about the date it is likely he wrote The Acts around A.D. 85.

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<sup>3</sup> From the “Introduction” in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9, p. 15. Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

The first nine chapters of The Acts take us from the ascension of Jesus through the conversion of Saul. We are picking up the story for our study in midstream, at *ch. 10*. We should, however, get our bearings by noting what is recorded in the preceding chapters. The major events recounted there are:

Our Lord's promise to the disciples about the Holy Spirit (*ch. 1:3-8*)

His ascension (*ch. 1:9-11*)

Pentecost (*ch. 2*)

Mighty works of apostles (*ch. 3*)

The first persecution (*chs. 4; 5*)

Life of the congregation (*chs. 2:43-47; 4:32-37; 6:1-6*)

Remarkable conversions (*chs. 2:37-42; 4:1-4; 5:12-14*)

Stephen, the first martyr (*chs. 6:8 to 8:1*)

Saul's persecution and conversion (*chs. 7:58; 8:1-3; 9*)

The gospel declared beyond Jerusalem (*chs. 8; 9:31-42*)

As we read these nine chapters (preferably all at one time) we should try to imagine what life was like for these Christians in the first excitement of their newly given faith.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be studied in the circle or group meeting.)

1. Why do we need books like the Gospels and The Acts?  
What was Luke's reason for writing his Gospel? See *Luke 1:1-4*.  
Does it seem to you that The Acts was simply a continuation of the Third Gospel, and that the reason for writing the Gospel might also be Luke's reason for writing the Acts?  
What was the Scripture of the early church?  
Why did the church eventually form the New Testament?
2. What is Jesus' promise about the Holy Spirit?  
Study *John 14:26*, which is Jesus' promise that the Spirit would be given to the church. When? See *John 16:17*. What did Jesus promise the Spirit would do? See *John 14:26; 15:26-27; 16:13-14*. Why is he known only to Christians, in the church? See *John 14:17*.  
What is the promise in *Acts 1:8*? What will the Spirit give the church the power to do?  
What did the Holy Spirit do in the earliest days of the church, as we have the record in *Acts, chs. 1 to 9*?  
What is the significance of Pentecost for the church? How is it observed in your church?  
Some churches do not observe Pentecost Sunday. Why not?



## CHAPTER II

### *The Working of the Spirit*

**For Background Study: Acts 10:1 to 11:18**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 11:1-18**

**Notes for Leaders: page 51**

#### THE SITUATION

Most of the people who became Christians in the earliest days of the church were Jews or converts to Judaism. The church's leaders were Jews. Although Jesus taught that his gospel would be for all the world, his followers did not at first see the full implications of that teaching.

The disciples failed to see these implications because they had a deeply ingrained antagonism toward Gentiles, an antagonism intensified by long periods of bondage to foreign conquerors. Judaism—despite the teachings of its prophets—had no vision of world-wide expansion. It thought of its teachings as the exclusive property of the chosen people. To embrace the religious teachings of Judaism, a person had first to become a Jew. Some of the early Christians considered their religion to be for Jews or Jewish converts only. Since the Jews had been in bondage to foreigners time and time again, and were now in bondage to Rome, it would take something remarkable to make the Christians see that non-Jews, even Romans, could also be followers of Jesus.

This is the significance of the story about the conversion of Cornelius, the Roman centurion. Luke is describing here what the Holy Spirit did to break through deep prejudices with the gospel. He is also showing how the Spirit is given: as a gift to “all who heard the word” (*Acts 10:44*). When the Spirit came as a gift, Peter could baptize as believers in the name of Jesus Christ only those to whom the gift of the Spirit had been given.

Although the Judaistic shell is hard, it is here beginning to crack and Christianity is on the way to becoming the free gospel for all men. With all the attention we pay to Paul as the eloquent example and spokesman for the freedom we have in Christ, we ought not forget that the Spirit used Peter to break the trail.

## FOR HOME STUDY

**Acts 10:1-8.** Cornelius was a Roman military man, leader of a company of one hundred soldiers. He was a “God-fearer,” that is, a man attracted to the one God of the Jewish religion and its ethical teaching without having become a Jew. He was also a generous man, and deeply religious. Yet he needed something more than Judaism had to offer.

**Acts 10:9-16.** Peter had already made some progress in overcoming his attitude of exclusiveness, for he was staying at Joppa with a tanner, a man who was permanently “unclean” (by Jewish standards) because he worked with the dead bodies of animals.

**Acts 10:17-33.** Jews would not entertain Gentiles in their homes, nor accept hospitality from them. Yet Peter invited Cornelius’ friends into the house, and he visited with Cornelius. The Holy Spirit was breaking down stubborn walls of prejudice.

**Acts 10:34-43.** Note the way Peter presents the gospel to this Roman company. We do not have word-for-word accounts of these testimonies—no secretary was there to take the sermon down in shorthand!—but the summaries of a historian who writes many years after the event took place. Even so, the outline of this sermon is very similar to the outlines of the other sermons we have in The Acts, with this exception: this is the only apostolic sermon to mention the mighty works of Jesus (v. 38). What in the sermon “spoke to the condition” of the Romans who heard it?

**Acts 10:44-48.** This is another “Pentecost,” for the Holy Spirit comes upon the company and they speak in ecstatic sounds, the same as on the first Pentecost of the church. Speaking in tongues is the sign that the Spirit has come upon them, has been *given* to the Gentiles. Peter then baptizes them with water in the name of Jesus Christ.

Baptism was practiced from the very beginning of the church as a sign of repentance and of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

**Acts 11:1-18.** To be studied in the circle or group meeting.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be discussed in the circle or group meeting.)

1. The Holy Spirit works directly in the affairs of men (*Acts 11:4-14*).
  - a. What kind of person was Cornelius? (*Ch. 10:1-2*.) Why did he need the gospel? Wasn’t he good enough without it? Did he know he needed it?
  - b. What kind of person was Peter? What prejudice had to be overcome? How did the Holy Spirit do it?



- c. Can persons just naturally grow into disciples of Christ, and once they are disciples will they always make the right decisions? Must there always be some work of the Spirit to make people disciples? Do persons have to be *aware* of the Spirit's working in them? How do the visionary experiences of Cornelius and Peter help answer these questions?

2. The Holy Spirit is *given* to those who hear the Word.

We do not receive the Holy Spirit as the result of our own strenuous efforts or as a reward for our good works. We do not determine who shall receive the Spirit. He comes to those who are "chosen by God as witnesses" (*ch. 10:41*), and he is given as a gift. We do not earn gifts—we either accept them with thanks or we refuse to accept them. Men have always done both with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Read *ch. 11:15-17* and then *ch. 10:44-48* and discuss these questions:

- a. When did the Holy Spirit come upon Cornelius and his friends? (*Chs. 11:15; 10:44.*)
  - b. How did Peter and his companions *know* that the Spirit had come to these Gentiles? (*Ch. 10:46.*) Study *ch. 2* for further understanding of this strange experience. Is "speaking in tongues" the only way to know that a person has received the Spirit? How can we know?
  - c. On what basis do men decide whether they will accept or turn down the gift of the Holy Spirit?
3. What is the meaning of baptism? (*Chs. 10:47-48; 11:16.*)
- a. Why is water used to signify repentance?
  - b. Why did Peter baptize the Gentiles after the Spirit had come upon them?
  - c. What does baptism signify about a person's relationship to Christ?
4. What is the revolutionary new insight which the Spirit now revealed to these Christians? (See *ch. 11:18.*)
- a. Why was this a revolutionary idea to the Jewish Christians?
  - b. What is revolutionary about it for us today?
  - c. What divisions and distinctions between persons are there in your church? Do they prevent you from experiencing a oneness in Christ? How do you know this oneness in your church?
  - d. What divisions and distinctions separate you from other Christians in your community? In what ways are you allowing these divisions to put you in the position of opposing God? (*Ch. 11:17.*)
  - e. Is your church a fellowship of many different kinds of people (not just a membership but a fellowship!)? Who are not in that fellowship? Is it an act of resisting the Holy Spirit to keep them out?

## CHAPTER III

### *Called by the Spirit*

**For Background Study: Acts 26:1-23; Gal. 1:10-24; Rom. 1:1-7;**

**II Cor. 4:5-12; I Cor. 15:8-10; Gal. 2:20**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 26:1-23**

**Notes for Leaders: page 52**

### THE SITUATION

The apostle Paul dominates the rest of the book of The Acts. We shall therefore spend this session on him, basing our discussion upon his own account before King Agrippa of his conversion and his career. We should also read some excerpts from his letters in order to understand him better.

Paul was a young adult, about the same age as Jesus of Nazareth, who became a Christian around A.D. 32 in Jerusalem and died in Rome some thirty years later. He was a native of Tarsus, and a Jew of the sect of the Pharisees; he was also a Roman citizen.

Paul himself tells us that he was an ardent and zealous Jew who had tried conscientiously to keep the law of his fathers. He believed that salvation consisted in keeping the law. Therefore, he was dead set against the Christians, because they were destroying his Jewish faith. He persecuted the church for three reasons: "(a) This church accepted as Savior a crucified person who, it asserted, had been raised from the dead as God's Son, empowered to establish the Kingdom of God. (b) Certain spokesmen for this Messiah were announcing openly that God had thus abrogated the requirements of circumcision, righteousness through the law, and sacrifice in the temple. (c) As a Pharisee, Paul had developed a driving zeal for righteousness, which demanded that he defend the race, the law, and the temple against this new blasphemy."<sup>1</sup>

Paul witnessed, without protesting, the murder of the first Christian martyr, Stephen; and then set out as a voluntary emissary of the Jewish council of Jerusalem to warn Jews in other cities of the threat from the ideas of the followers of Jesus.

While he was going to Damascus on this mission, he experienced the

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<sup>1</sup> "Paul the Apostle," by Paul S. Minear, in *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 7, p. 206. Abingdon Press. Used by permission.

well-known conversion which made him a Christian. We are told that the Lord appeared to him in a blinding light and appointed him to be the apostle to the Gentiles. This was as radical an about-face as we could possibly imagine, for everything he opposed in Christianity he was now to defend and declare. He was to change his mind, his way of thinking, entirely, and turn his brilliant talents not to explaining the law but to opposing it as the way of salvation. "God needed an honest interpreter who had experienced the maximum success as a 'righteous man,' and could now be trusted with the truth of the maximum futility of that success."<sup>2</sup>

Paul's conversion brought him into the relationship which he describes as being "in Christ." In his writings he has given classic expression to the Christian experience (see *Gal. 2:20*); no one will ever say it better. He knew "the peace of God, which passes all understanding" (*Phil. 4:7*); but in another sense, he knew no peace.

Becoming a Christian brought Paul into conflict not only with political authorities and businessmen and with his own kinsmen in Judaism, but also with strong forces within the Christian church itself. The book of The Acts minimizes some of these conflicts, but Paul's own letters tell us how intense they were. We shall discuss the conflict in connection with the Jerusalem council (*Acts, ch. 15*); here we simply want to note that for Paul the call of the Holy Spirit was a call to battle, and he never laid down his arms until the end.

Yet he learned how to oppose men without hating them as persons. He could be entirely forthright in confronting his enemies to their faces, or in describing their faults in his letters; yet he spoke the truth in love and he thought of all men as potentially new men in Christ. It is hard to despise a man's ideas without also despising the man, especially when his ideas lead to vicious and deceitful attack upon one's own character. This is what Paul faced, and this accounts for the embarrassing self-defense which we read in the Corinthian letters. Yet Paul's primary concern is never that he has been personally maligned but only that the maligning may awaken the faith of some in his Lord.

Paul was sure of his calling as an apostle of Jesus Christ, sure that he had been called to this work by the Holy Spirit. As we follow his career during the rest of our study, we too will be convinced that here was a man whom the Spirit used mightily to turn men "from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith" in Jesus Christ the Lord (*Acts 26:18*).

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.



## FOR HOME STUDY

In home study it will be interesting to compare two accounts of Paul's early life, conversion, and the years immediately following. These are the accounts in The Acts and in Galatians.

Compare *Acts 26:4-11* with *Gal. 1:13-14*. Paul emphasizes how deep his Jewishness was, and how intense his hatred and persecution of the Christians. He wants to make two points clear: (a) This antagonism to Judaism is not done out of ignorance or indifference; on the contrary, he knows what he is doing, and does it with sorrow in his heart (see *Rom. 9:1-5*). (b) It is marvelous that the Holy Spirit uses this violent enemy and makes him the greatest defender of what he has opposed.

Compare *Acts 26:12-18* with *Gal. 1:15-16*. In Galatians, Paul makes these points: (a) God had set him apart for his vocation before he was born; (b) the call was through God's grace, an act of great divine favor toward Paul; (c) Christ was made known to him in his conversion. In The Acts and in Galatians, Paul says that he was called by God to preach Christ among the Gentiles. In The Acts he expands on what this mission involves.

We cannot reconstruct with any certainty exactly what Paul did between his conversion and his arrival in Antioch to assist Barnabas there (*Acts 11:25*). The material that follows in this first chapter of Galatians is somewhat different from Luke's account in The Acts. Perhaps fourteen years elapsed between the two events (conversion and arrival at Antioch), years that were spent in solitude and meditation as well as active missionary work in "the regions of Syria and Cilicia." Paul was in his native city of Tarsus (he probably spent most of the fourteen years there) when Barnabas summoned him to help in Antioch.

**Rom. 1:1-7.** Note how Paul identifies himself at the beginning of his letters (scan the first verses of I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians). This opening self-description in Romans is the most elaborate. He calls himself a "slave" (a more accurate translation than "servant") of Jesus Christ, an apostle, one set apart for the gospel "to bring about obedience to the faith . . . among all the nations." His calling and his mission are never separated in his mind.

**II Cor. 4:5-12.** The chief point about his ministry here is that "we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake." Paul's apostleship involved him from the very beginning in the threat of death.

**I Cor. 15:8-10.** In the early church the apostles were those persons who had known the risen Lord. Paul contends that he should be included with them. He did not see the Lord in the forty days after his resurrection; but God graciously appeared to him in his vision on the Damascus road. Paul rightly regards this as the most significant event of his life.

**Gal. 2:20.** This verse summarizes Paul's conception of the life that he began after he was called by the Holy Spirit. He is no longer his own; he belongs completely and entirely to another, so that he lives not by his own power and his own resources but by faith in the Son of God.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be studied in the circle or group meeting.)

1. The call of the Holy Spirit always requires a change in the persons he calls.

What is the most radical change in thought or attitude or habit that you have ever made? What caused the change? A personal or family crisis? new ideas you learned from study? the pressure of your job or your social group?

Why is it hard for people to change their attitudes, beliefs, habits, ideas? Why does change always threaten our security?

What is your opinion of people who have never changed their ideas and beliefs?

What change has the Holy Spirit required of you? What are some occasions on which the Spirit has led you to rethink your discipleship?

2. There is no way of knowing where the call of the Holy Spirit might lead one whom he calls.

A woman in a Southern town said recently: "Don't talk to me about the way Christ unifies family life. He has broken up my family. I go around speaking about ways to love our neighbors who are Negroes while my husband attends Klan meetings."

What did the Holy Spirit require of Paul?

Why do we think that being a Christian will assure us an easy life? (This is not a rhetorical question; consider it carefully.) What is wrong about this assumption?

When is it particularly hard to be a Christian? What do you do when you fail? What do you do when you have achieved some measure of success? (See *Gal. 2:20*.)

There is a danger in thinking that what the Holy Spirit might require of a Christian is always something unusual and spectacular. It is often easier to carry through on the spectacular than the ordinary! The point is not to be either eager or anxious about what the Spirit requires—only pray that you will be faithful when the summons comes! Bearing this observation in mind, consider this question: What might it mean to suffer for Christ in the United States today?

### 3. The Spirit gives stability to life.

Although it seems as though Paul led a very unstable life, never knowing what might happen tomorrow, he found his stability in his faith. Confident that God had called him, he said, "I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content" (*Phil. 4:11*). Since Christ was primary for him, everything else was secondary—and he meant literally everything else (*Phil., ch. 3*). What are we anxious about these days? What is behind our surface anxieties? Why do we fear death? Why are we panicked by our guilt? Why is life meaningless and a puzzle to us?

What gives you a sense of stability about your existence? What things could you lose and still not lose your faith in God?

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## CHRISTIANITY DOES NOT EXIST

Sören Kierkegaard, the Danish thinker of a hundred years ago, wrote: "The Christianity of the New Testament simply does not exist. Here there is nothing to reform; what has to be done is to throw light upon a criminal offense against Christianity, prolonged through the centuries, perpetrated by millions (more or less guiltily), whereby they have cunningly, under the guise of perfecting Christianity, sought little by little to cheat God out of Christianity, and have succeeded in making Christianity exactly the opposite of what it is in the New Testament. . . .

"When one sees what it is to be a Christian in Denmark, how could it occur to anyone that this is what Jesus Christ talks about; cross and agony and suffering, crucifying the flesh, suffering for the doctrine, being salt, being sacrificed, etc.? No, in Protestantism, especially in Denmark, Christianity marches to a different melody, to the tune of 'Merrily we roll along, roll along, roll along'—Christianity is enjoyment of life, tranquilized, as neither the Jew nor the pagan was, by the assurance that the thing about eternity is settled, settled precisely in order that we might find pleasure in enjoying this life, as well as any pagan or Jew."—*From Attack Upon "Christendom," pp. 33-35. Princeton University Press. Used by permission.*



# CHAPTER IV

## *Called to Mission*

**For Background Study: Acts 11:19 to 14:28**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 13:17-41**

**Notes for Leaders: page 52**

### THE SITUATION

The church at Antioch became one of the strong centers of Christianity. Barnabas and Paul worked in Antioch together, and during a famine in Jerusalem they were sent there with an offering from the Antioch Christians for their Jerusalem brothers in need.

During a service of worship the Holy Spirit directed this Antioch church to set apart Barnabas and Saul for a special mission to the Gentiles. In *Acts 13:1-4* we read of this directive, and of the commissioning by the laying on of hands.

In this act the Christians at Antioch expressed the essential meaning of ordination: called to mission. This is the real meaning of being an apostle: an apostle is one who is sent, one who goes on a mission. The church that is true to its apostolic origins—that is to say, the church that is true to its own nature, as set forth in the Bible—is a sending church. This is the way the gospel has come to us and to people in every generation: passed on from one city to another, from one group of people to another. If the impulse to mission ever died, the church and the gospel would die too.

Under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, Barnabas, Saul, and John Mark (Barnabas' young kinsman) sailed from Seleucia to the island of Cyprus, which was Barnabas' homeland. They followed the familiar pattern of preaching first in the synagogue (the synagogue always welcomed visiting speakers; compare *Acts 13:14-15* with *Luke 4:16-17*), where their listeners consisted both of Jews and converts to Judaism.

From Cyprus the ambassadors sailed to Asia Minor. There John Mark left them; we do not know why, although we know that Paul did not receive his defection kindly (see *Acts 15:37-38*). (*Colossians 4:10* suggests that Paul and Mark were later reconciled.)

Paul and Silas went about a hundred miles inland, across the steep Taurus Mountains, preached and established congregations in Antioch of Pisidia, Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. The return journey took them back

through the same cities, and gave them the chance to strengthen the work they had begun. Upon arriving back in the sending church at Antioch in Syria, they reported how the gospel had been received by the Gentiles.

These chapters describe some of the opposition there was to the gospel. *Acts, ch. 12*, tells of a persecution in Jerusalem under Herod Agrippa I (grandson of the Herod who ruled when Jesus was born, father of the Agrippa before whom Paul defended his faith in *Acts, ch. 26*). This was not a widespread persecution, and was probably done to please the Jews, with whom Herod carried favor.

In Antioch of Pisidia the jealous Jews, when they saw that some of their converts were interested in the gospel, incited enough persecution to drive Paul and Barnabas out of the city. The unbelieving Jews stoned them in Iconium, and followed them to Lystra, where they beat Paul so badly that he was left for dead on the edge of the city.

We noted in our last study that opposition from the Jews was only one source of conflict for Paul in his work. Yet this opposition from his countrymen must have wounded him deeply, and gives special poignancy to his words, "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them [Israel] is that they may be saved" (*Rom. 10:1*; see also *ch. 9:1-15*).

Although this missionary journey marks an important development in the life of Christianity, it is more important to consider *what* the ambassadors preached than *where* they preached. Therefore, the study in circles and other groups should concentrate on *the apostolic message*, particularly as we have it in *Acts 13:16-41*, Paul's sermon in the synagogue in Antioch of Pisidia, before Jews and Gentiles.

There seem to be four main points in this sermon:

1. Jesus the Savior comes from the posterity of Israel (*vs. 16-23*).
2. Salvation is made possible by the death and resurrection of Jesus (*vs. 24-31*).
3. Through this man the good news of the forgiveness of sins is proclaimed, freeing men from this bondage in a way the law could not do (*vs. 32-39*).
4. A warning (*vs. 40-41*).

This sermon corresponds very closely to the apostolic message, as we can reconstruct it from the letters of Paul and the record of The Acts. The message had six points. As summarized in *Westminster Adult Leader* for Oct.-Dec., 1957, these points are:

1. The age of fulfillment—day of judgment and blessings, the time of salvation envisioned by the prophets—has come.
2. This age has happened through the ministry, the death, and the resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.
3. Because of his resurrection on the third day according to the Scriptures, he has been exalted at the right hand of God as the Lord and

Christ, the Messianic head of the new Israel.

4. The Holy Spirit has visited the church with power and glory.
5. The age of Christ will be consummated by Christ's return.
6. Therefore repent and be baptized.

## FOR HOME STUDY

**Acts 11:19-30.** Antioch was a cosmopolitan city, and the Christian church there had both Jews and Greeks (perhaps the Greek-speaking Jews) in its membership. It was a remarkable congregation for its generosity to the Jerusalem Christians and its sense of mission.

**Acts, ch. 12.** We have commented on this persecution above, in the section "The Situation."

**Acts 13:1-3.** See above, under "The Situation."

**Acts 13:4-12.** The island of Cyprus was the place from which Barnabas had come. Note that in this passage Luke remarks that Saul was also called Paul, and hereafter he refers to him by his Roman name. A reasonable explanation is that Paul had both names, and mention of the Roman pro-consul suggested to Luke that it would be more appropriate hereafter to use the Roman name.

**Acts 13:13-16.** See above, under "The Situation," on the custom of the synagogue to hear visiting speakers.

**Acts 13:17-41.** For group or circle study.

**Acts 13:42-52.** The reaction to the sermon, and Paul's announcement that "we turn to the Gentiles." He would continue to preach to Jews and to speak in the synagogues when he had the chance, but he recognizes that the Jews are rejecting their Messiah.

**Acts, ch. 14.** The rest of the journey and return to Antioch.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be studied in the circle or group meeting.)

1. The church that knows the gospel has a mission to make the gospel known.

A review question: What was the commission given Paul at his conversion? (*Ch. 26:16-18*).

What led the church at Antioch to send Barnabas and Saul on this journey? (*Ch. 13:1-4*).



## Two quotations:

“A church is validated as a church of God, not by its organized structure, but by its missionary action. The church becomes the church, not when it extols its virtues, but when it accepts its God-given mission. The church is the church when, with full abandon, it gives itself to the living Lord and, in the power of the Holy Spirit, and with the standard of everlasting Biblical truth, undertakes missionary activity on the road of obedience.”<sup>1</sup>

“The motivation for missions is not natural to humankind. It is part of our individualism that we prefer to be a ‘live and let live’ kind of people. We do not want to meddle in another man’s business and we don’t want his interference in ours. We are not by natural disposition loving and compassionate toward others in their need.

“God has overcome this self-centeredness by calling us into a fellowship of love. It is love for neighbor, it is love for enemy, it is love requiring sacrifice. Love becomes the hallmark of the Christian. Love, so given, so implanted, leads us to offer the gospel to the world.

“But God does not leave us to see the missionary implication of love. He expresses his will very clearly at this point: we are to make disciples of all nations. Our motivation is both the love that constrains us and the obedience that is required of us.”<sup>2</sup>

In the light of these comments, how would you meet these arguments against the missionary outreach of the church:

“Charity begins at home.”

“They have their religion and we have Christianity. Theirs suits them, ours suits us. Let well enough alone.”

“I don’t believe in missions.”

What is the weakness of the argument that the church is a bulwark against communism, and so we should support missions?

## 2. What is the gospel?

Imagine that a Jewish friend in another city has asked you to describe the essentials of the Christian faith. What would you write?

Is Paul’s sermon outdated? Was it more appropriate to his time than to ours? What should preachers preach about today?

If you receive a Saturday newspaper that carries the Sunday sermon topics, read them over and try to imagine what they will be about. How are they the same, and how do they differ, from Paul’s sermon?

How did this sermon meet people’s needs? What needs? Why were they eager to hear more? Do the same needs exist today?

<sup>1</sup> John A. Mackay, in *Theology Today*, Oct., 1954.

<sup>2</sup> George L. Hunt, *Rediscovering the Church*, p. 155. Association Press, 1956. Used by permission.

## CHAPTER V

### *The Freedom of the Spirit*

**For Background Study: Acts, ch. 15; Gal., ch. 2; 5:1, 13-25**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 15:1-21**

**Notes for Leaders: page 53**

#### THE SITUATION

The apostolic church was a divided church. Luke, looking back wistfully from a later period, gave early Christianity the appearance of greater unity than it probably possessed. We receive a more realistic picture from the letters of Paul. As we try to reconstruct the situation described in *Acts, ch. 15*, we must keep both Luke and Paul in mind.

The dividing issue was a crucial one for the gospel and for the destiny of the Christian movement. On the surface the question was, Should the Gentile converts to Christianity be circumcised before they could be Christians? *Acts 15:5* states the issue as bluntly as it could be said. But behind this question was one more fundamental: Was Christianity to make the break away from Judaism and become a truly universal religion? Paul saw clearly that this was what had to be. James and other leaders refused to acknowledge that this was the choice. They hoped a Judaistic and a Gentile Christianity might exist side by side in the church. Peter and Barnabas stood in the middle, unwilling to go as far as Paul, unwilling to accept the full implications of James's position. Paul was contending for the freedom of the Holy Spirit, and it is fortunate for us that he ultimately prevailed.

The problem was referred from Antioch to Jerusalem for advice. It seems there were two questions: (1) Should Gentile converts be circumcised, in accordance with the Jewish ceremonial law? (2) Should Gentiles and Jewish Christians have table fellowship together?

It is hard for us, centuries later, to understand these questions or to appreciate their crucial significance, since we are not Jews. But the issue behind the questions is crucial and if we understand the questions, we will be able to see the issue.

John Knox explains the first question admirably. "Nonassociation with Gentiles, or at the most very limited association, was one of the primary tenets of Judaism. When, therefore, large numbers of non-Jews were re-

ceived directly out of paganism into what had been originally a society of Jews, the most serious problems were created, especially for the members of the older Jewish community. Should not these new converts (they would very naturally argue) accept the obligations along with the privileges of Judaism? How could they share in Christ, the fulfillment of the law and the prophets, unless they observed the law and the prophets themselves? How could one belong to the new covenant who did not first, or also, belong to the old? Jesus and his disciples, even Paul, were Jews, and the original communities were Jewish communities—it could not have been otherwise, for Christianity is the true Israel—but how could one belong to the true Israel who did not belong to Israel at all? Such questions were very natural ones; and to those who asked them the admission of Gentiles to the church, without the requirement of circumcision and submission to the Jewish law, would have seemed an intolerable anomaly.”<sup>1</sup>

The other question was table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Christians in Antioch observed the Lord’s Supper together, followed by a common meal. Jews, as we know, had very strict dietary laws, which would be violated when they ate with Gentiles. Apparently they were eating with Gentiles at Antioch, but it became part of the issue when the matter was discussed at Jerusalem.

According to Luke, the discussion and debate was kept on a very high plane, and James stated the judgment that prevailed in the council. At the time it may have appeared to be a clear-cut victory for Paul’s point of view. Paul was sure Gentiles did not have to be circumcised; by the same fact, there was nothing wrong with table fellowship between Jewish and Gentile Christians.

But it was not a clear-cut conclusion. It was a compromise. The council agreed on the first point, but imposed certain restrictions regarding the second.

The matter came to a head sometime after the council meeting, when Peter visited Barnabas and Paul and the church in Antioch. He shared in table fellowship. But some supporters of James criticized him for doing so, and “he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party” (*Gal. 2:12*). Paul then strongly denounced Peter for his cowardice and double-mindedness (*Gal. 2:14*). Freedom from law was freedom from *all* the Jewish law. “A man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ.” (*Gal. 2:15*.) Paul saw that the freedom of the Spirit was all, or nothing at all.

Even Barnabas could not accept the radical view of Paul that Christianity made this complete break with Judaism. He too, says Paul, was

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<sup>1</sup> John Knox, *The Early Church and the Coming Great Church*, p. 37. Abingdon Press, 1955. Used by permission.



carried away by the insincerity of the party of James (*Gal. 2:13*). Therefore, he and Paul separated, Barnabas returning home to Cyprus (never to reappear in the records of the early church) and Paul choosing Silas as his companion for his second missionary journey.<sup>2</sup>

Christian liberty was not merely an issue that faced the apostolic church. It is a cardinal principle of Protestant, Biblical theology. We must, therefore, describe it further, in order that we may discuss it together intelligently.

Paul states and describes the principle in Galatians and in Romans. "We have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified." (*Gal. 2:16*.) "Now before faith came, we were confined under the law, kept under restraint until faith should be revealed. So that the law was our custodian until Christ came, that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a custodian; for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (*Gal. 3:23-28*.)

Paul, as a Pharisee, had thought that he could be counted righteous by God if he kept God's laws and fulfilled the ceremonies of his religion. Yet he knew he did not keep the laws perfectly, and the ritual was unsatisfying. But when he became a Christian he learned that he could be counted righteous by God if he accepted the sacrifice of Christ in his behalf. If Paul, led by the Spirit, believed and accepted this, he was saved, saved by his faith in Christ as his redeemer.

The freedom of the Spirit, then, is freedom from salvation by works, salvation by obedience to laws. The Christian has no laws to live by. He has only the command, "You shall love the Lord your God . . . and your neighbor as yourself." The Christian is free, for he cannot be confined within a long list of standards that say, "This thing is a Christian act, this is not; this thing a Christian will do, this he will not." But with freedom comes responsibility, for each Christian has to decide for himself, at the moment and in this place, what it means to love God and his neighbor as himself.

In *Gal., ch. 5*, Paul writes about this freedom, and tells (in a "such as" list, not in terms of a new law) how one might live in obedience to the great commandment.

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<sup>2</sup> It is very difficult to combine *Acts, ch. 15*, and *Gal., ch. 2*, into a consistent and satisfactory account of what happened. Some reputable scholars feel they do not refer to the same event at all. However, I have accepted the more conventional view and attempted the above narrative of what happened.

Paul was not dependent on the Jerusalem council for his understanding of the freedom of the Spirit; but that council made the decision which Paul carried to its logical conclusion, although he lost his closest friends when he did so.

## FOR HOME STUDY

We suggest that you will come close to the narrative we have given above if you read the background Scripture in this order:

*Acts 15:1-5*—The issues raised  
*Acts 15:6-29*—Debate and decision  
*Gal. 2:1-10*—Paul's account  
*Acts 15:30-35*—In Antioch  
*Gal. 2:11-14*—Peter backs down  
*Acts 15:36-41*—Separation from Barnabas  
*Gal. 2:15-21*—The issue explained  
*Gal., ch. 5*—Life under freedom

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be discussed in the circle or group meeting.)

### 1. The Jerusalem compromise.

The two questions—circumcision and table fellowship—and the apparent compromise have a familiar sound: "We will recognize them as Christians, but we don't have to eat with them, even at the Lord's Table!" What examples of this arise in your church and community?

### 2. Understanding Christian liberty, the freedom of the Spirit.

What does it mean to be "counted righteous" before God?

Why do we need to be "reconciled" to God?

Why is it impossible to be saved by our works?

What has Christ done that he could be "counted righteous" for us?

Why does salvation by works (by the law) lead so easily to self-righteousness?

What is the danger of salvation by grace through faith? (See *Rom., ch. 6*).

### 3. The fruits of freedom.

In what ways are the sins listed in *Gal. 5:19-21* acts of hatred, lovelessness?

In what ways is the "fruit of the Spirit," described in *Gal. 5:22-23*, rooted in love?

# CHAPTER VI

## *Receiving the Spirit*

**For Background Study: Acts 16:1 to 19:7**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 16:1-34; 19:1-7**

**Notes for Leaders: page 54**

### THE SITUATION

It is not uncommon for Presbyterians to boast about the influential people in the membership of their church. They will tell the visitor that they have the leading citizens, the banker, the newspaper editor, and so forth.

Our first impulse is to read The Acts in the same way. What kind of people became Christians on Paul's journeys through Asia, Europe, and Greece? Who were they? What was their standing in their communities? Would they be "our sort" of people?

Our Christian conscience soon tells us this is the wrong way to look at the matter; and so far as the early church is concerned, it is a useless way. Jesus' enemies accused him of attracting "tax collectors and sinners," the outcasts whom all decent people scorned; but of course Jesus also attracted some socially acceptable people too. It is the same way with the early church. People of all social classes, on all economic levels, both received and rejected the Spirit of God. This is largely an irrelevant inquiry, both then and now.

Those persons who respond to God's love do so because the gospel reveals their need to them, and they know that God can meet their need. Those who reject the Spirit do so because they do not hear him speak, disclosing to them their need for salvation. They may feel a need, of one kind or another; but they do not see that their real need is one that the gospel meets, or they are unwilling to face what the gospel requires of them.

For this meeting and the next one we will follow Paul on his second missionary journey and observe those persons who receive the Spirit and those who reject him. We shall study the same chapters of The Acts for both meetings, observing for this meeting how men receive the Spirit; and for the next, how they reject the Spirit. The passage for group or circle study, however, will be different in each meeting.

We make this study in order to see more clearly our own responsibility



for witnessing. We must make the gospel known at every opportunity, so that those persons whom God has called will hear the word and respond to it.

## FOR HOME STUDY

**Acts 16:1-5.** We know a great deal about Timothy from the book of The Acts, from the epistles bearing his name, and from some references in other epistles. He had been converted on Paul's first journey to Derbe and Lystra, and was well thought of by the church in that vicinity. His mother (whose name was Eunice) was a Jewish convert to Christianity; his father was a Greek and probably not a Christian.

Timothy accompanied Paul on this second journey through Asia and on to Europe and Greece. Paul had a great deal of affection for him and confidence in him (see *Phil. 2:19-22*). When Paul fled from Berea (*Acts 17:14*), Timothy and Silas remained there, joining Paul later on in Corinth. Still later, Paul sent Timothy to deal with some of the disorders in the Corinthian church (*Acts 19:22*), but the situation was too difficult for him and he was replaced by Titus.

Timothy helped organize the offering for the church at Jerusalem, and accompanied Paul as far as Troas (*Acts 20:46*); but we do not know whether he went with Paul to Jerusalem or on to imprisonment in Rome.

**Acts 16:3** raises the question, Why did Paul have Timothy circumcised, just after he had fought energetically and successfully against the need for circumcision of Gentiles? (*Acts, ch. 15.*) One answer would be that at Jerusalem, Paul was fighting for a principle: justification by faith alone. Having won his principle, he was free to decide when it would do more harm than good to hold out against the rite. He apparently felt that the strategic thing to do in this instance was to have Timothy circumcised, and that he could do this without violating the theological principle which was central to his gospel. (*Gal. 2:5.*)

**Acts 16:6-10.** The interesting point in these verses is the way Paul feels led by the Holy Spirit in everything he does. We shall discuss this more fully in our eighth study. Note also that as Paul goes to Europe (Macedonia), he is accompanied by Luke. This we conclude from v. 10, where the author says, "We sought to go on into Macedonia." This is his first reference to himself as a member of Paul's missionary team.

**Acts 16:11-15.** Philippi is the location of the first Christian congregation on the Continent of Europe, and a woman, Lydia, is the first known convert in Europe. The Christian people in Philippi received one of Paul's most personal letters (the epistle to the Philippians), and from it we know

that the people here were a great encouragement in his ministry.

Lydia was a Gentile convert to Judaism who was worshiping at the synagogue by the riverside when Paul and his company stopped there for worship and testimony. Luke notes that she was a businesswoman, and speaks of her household—including slaves—being baptized. She opened her home to the missionaries now, and after their imprisonment (see v. 40).

It would be very profitable to read the short letter to the Philippians in connection with this passage, in order to imagine what this congregation meant to Paul. Probably Lydia was a leading spirit in making this the warm and generous church it was.

**Acts 16:16-40.** The first part of this passage will be examined in the next study. Here we want to note especially vs. 25-34, the conversion of the Philippian jailer.

This record of Paul and Silas witnessing to Christ in prison reminds us of the modern Christian martyr Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who was arrested and finally executed for his opposition to Nazism. A few months before his execution he wrote:

“Please don’t ever get anxious or worried about me, but don’t forget to pray for me—I’m sure you don’t! I am so sure of God’s guiding hand, and I hope I shall never lose that certainty. You must never doubt that I am traveling my appointed road with gratitude and cheerfulness. My past life is replete with God’s goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified. I am thankful for all those who have crossed my path, and all I wish is never to cause them sorrow, and that they, like me, will always be thankful for the forgiveness and mercy of God and sure of it.” In another letter he said: “God does not give us everything we want, but he does fulfill his promises, i.e., he still remains Lord of the earth and still preserves his church, constantly renewing our faith and not laying on us more than we can bear, gladdening us with his nearness and help, hearing our prayers and leading us along the best and straightest road to himself. In this way, God creates in us praises for himself.”<sup>1</sup>

Paul’s testimony resulted in the conversion of the jailer and his household. (An English officer who was with Bonhoeffer in his last weeks wrote of him, “He was one of the very few men that I have ever met to whom his God was real and close to him.”) What Paul tells the jailer is that active trust in God and his righteousness will gain for him eternal life. What in the quotations from Bonhoeffer further explains v. 31?

**Acts 17:1-9.** This is Luke’s account of response and rejection at Thessalonica. We shall study the rejection before the next meeting. At this point, notice in v. 4 the people who received the Spirit.

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<sup>1</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Prisoner for God*, pp. 185, 183. The Macmillan Company, 1954. Used by permission.

**Acts 17:10-34.** To be studied in connection with Chapter VII.

**Acts 18:1-4, 18-21.** Here we are introduced to Aquila and Priscilla. This couple were widely traveled Jews, who, after living for a time in Rome, came to Corinth following a persecution of Jews by Claudius in A.D. 49. They engaged with Paul in their mutual vocation of tentmaking, and shared in his great mission of Christian teaching. Their homes in Corinth and Ephesus were hospitable headquarters for new converts. They corrected Apollos' misunderstanding of the Christian faith.

**Acts 18:5-17.** To be studied in connection with Chapter VII.

**Acts 18:24 to 19:7.** Luke tells in succession two incidents about persons who know Christianity without knowing the Holy Spirit. (*Acts 18:23* is the beginning of Paul's third missionary journey.)

"The baptism of John" refers to the baptism of repentance practiced by John the Baptist. There was apparently a sect of "baptizers" who were closer to John the Baptist than to Jesus in their teachings. They knew some of the facts about Jesus, but they seemed not to have known (*a*) that Jesus was the Christ promised in the Old Testament; (*b*) that John wanted his followers to believe in Jesus as Lord; (*c*) that in addition to baptism by water for repentance there was baptism by the Holy Spirit, with power.

To Luke this is another illustration of the fact that when persons are baptized with the Spirit they receive great power. We can assume that Apollos was baptized by the Christians once he heard of the Spirit, just as the dozen disciples at Ephesus were so baptized by Paul.

There are persons who can know a great deal about Jesus and even testify to him but who still need also to know that there is a gift of greater power waiting for them when they receive the Holy Spirit.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be discussed in the circle or group meeting.)

1. Why do people become Christians?
2. How do people become Christians? What decision is involved in being a Christian—or is conscious decision involved in every case? *Are* we Christians, or do we *become* Christians?
3. What are some human relationships through which the spirit can work to persuade men of the truth of the gospel? What persons are most responsible for your being a Christian?
4. What is the relation between Christian education and evangelism?
5. If someone were to ask you the the question of *Acts 16:30*, how would you reply? What might Bonhoeffer reply? What is wrong (if anything) with Paul's reply?



6. What is missing from a gospel that has no conscious awareness of the Holy Spirit?
7. How would you describe a "typical Christian"? Is there such a person? How would you describe an "average Christian"? a "normal Christian"? an "abnormal Christian"? Where would you put Dietrich Bonhoeffer?
8. In your opinion, why did Paul have Timothy circumcised? Is compromise ever the Christian thing to do? Was this a compromise?

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### HOW HAVE WE LIVED?

"Life can be hard. Anxiety, emptiness, suffering, death, are doubtless inescapable. But all this misses the point. The measure of human life is not how soon or how late we die, or how long we are dead, but whether we have lived; not how much we have suffered or rejoiced, but to whose glory we have lived. The measure of our life is not whether we have found it comfortable or enjoyable, but whether, in our life, we gave. This is what the cross of Christ says to us."—*M. Holmes Hartshorne, in Crossroads, July- Sept., 1958, p. 32. Copyright, 1958, by W. L. Jenkins. Used by permission.*

# CHAPTER VII

## *Rejecting the Spirit*

**For Background Study: Acts 16:1 to 19:7**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 17:10-34**

**Notes for Leaders: page 54**

### THE SITUATION

Every time the Word of God is made known, there are those persons who hear it speak to their condition and those who find nothing in it for their needs. One person will say, "That sermon this morning really helped me." Another will say, "Funny, I didn't get anything out of it at all."

These two reactions to the same sermon can mean a number of different things. The person who said he profited from the sermon may have misunderstood it and have received the wrong kind of help from it. The person who received nothing may have been too tired that particular Sunday morning from staying up with a sick child the night before. Or, in saying he didn't get anything out of it, what he really meant was that the preacher had hit him with an uncomfortable truth which he did not want to recognize. We are always in the precarious danger of not hearing the truth of the gospel, and of rejecting the message God speaks to us from his Word, through the Holy Spirit.

Since this is a fairly common experience even for Christians, we should sympathize with the people in *Acts 16:1 to 19:7* who did not hear the gospel when Paul and the other missionaries declared it to them. We should feel a kinship with them, for we have also been deaf to the Spirit's leading more times than we care to acknowledge. It was a serious matter for the Jews at Thessalonica and the Greeks at Athens and Corinth to reject the gospel; but our judgment upon their rejection should be a judgment upon ourselves, in the spirit of our Lord, who said, "Judge not, that you be not judged" (*Matt. 7:1*).

Let us examine in this spirit the rejection by some of the Jews at Thessalonica.

The reason for their opposition is stated in what they said to the city officials: "These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also" (*Acts 17:6*). Christianity marked the end of the law as the way

of salvation and the beginning of salvation through the power of Christ's resurrection. These Jews were right: Christianity did turn *their* world upside down. It completely destroyed the basis for their faith. They were devout and sincere people who saw the security of their religion threatened by the gospel. It is not surprising that they tried to get rid of Paul and his fellow missionaries. We would do the same thing to anyone who was undermining our securities; in fact, we do it all the time.

Turning to the Greeks in Athens, we find here that the gospel and the voice of the Spirit are rejected for a somewhat different reason. The Athenians to whom Paul addressed his message were philosophers. They loved to discuss ideas and could be excited by new ideas or new interpretations of old ideas. Some of them were probably delightful dinner guests who could spark the dullest table conversation with witty remarks and penetrating sarcasm. They were the thinkers of their day, and as such made significant contributions to human history.

Paul was no second-rate thinker himself. Yet he did something which many of us who like to discuss ideas do not do: he became deeply involved in what he believed, committed to One in whom he believed, and he turned his brilliant intellectual capacities to the service of his faith. The Athenians who rejected Paul's message were unwilling to meet him on the ground of commitment, of faith. They did not see that beyond ideas is One who shows the consequences of ideas and calls for conduct that will pay the consequences.

This is a judgment upon ourselves also. We enjoy sermons about love and fellowship and duty until the preacher begins to describe what these words mean in concrete situations. The Athenians rejected the resurrection, and we Christians accept it; but would we do so if we realized that Christ's resurrection means our death and resurrection also? (See *Rom., ch. 6.*)

Acts does not tell us much about the Corinthians, but Paul's letters to this church and what we know of Corinth allow us to surmise the situation there. Corinth in those days typified immorality. "To live like a Corinthian" summed up in a phrase all kinds of immoral acts. Some of this got into the church at Corinth (see *I Cor. 5:1*); and in addition the church was torn by rivalries, party spirit, ill will, doctrinal conflicts.

Here is an illustration of rejecting the Spirit which strikes uncomfortably close to home. There was the outright rejection of the Spirit by persons who did not want to change their conduct; but there was also the rejection by those who had heard the gospel, had become Christians, and yet who created controversy in the church, raised questions about what leaders they ought to follow, and practiced social discrimination at the Lord's Table. A person can hear the Spirit in one minute, and reject him the next. This is the sobering caution that comes from Paul's experiences



in Corinth, a caution that is for us as well.

“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with the judgment you pronounce you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother’s eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? . . . You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother’s eye.”—*Matt. 7: 1-3, 5.*

## FOR HOME STUDY

**Acts 16:16-24.** This was not really opposition to Christianity, except in an indirect way. The owners of the unfortunate girl had Paul imprisoned because he had struck at their livelihood; but they did not see that it was Christianity which threatened their incomes. They thought it was Judaism, with its refusal to worship the emperor. We therefore do not count this as a reflection of Christianity.

**Acts 17:1-15.** We have commented on the essential meaning of these verses above under “The Situation.”

**Acts 17:22-31.** This sermon illustrates very well the preacher’s attempt to establish a point of contact with his hearers, and the failure of the attempt.

Paul’s audience consisted of Greek Stoics and Epicureans. He therefore tried to “talk their language” and show what Christianity held in common with these philosophies: God being unconfined to temples and churches, God being creator, God being ruler of nations and their destinies, God being near each one of us, God being spirit. Now as well as in Athens then, many men of good will who are not Christians believe these things in their own way. There is nothing unique about all this, if you leave Christ out of it, and certainly very little to turn the world upside down.

It is the distinctively Christian part of his message that is greeted with mockery, and (from some), “We will hear you again about this.” The message is: (1) Repent! (2) Day of judgment! (3) The resurrection of Jesus from the dead!

One commentator on these verses has made the attractive suggestion that after Paul had the discouraging experience of failure to meet the philosophers “where they were” he ruefully wrote to the people of Corinth: “When I came to *you*, brethren, I did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God in lofty words or wisdom. For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. And I was with you in weakness and in much fear and trembling [after my failure at Athens]; and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God” (*I Cor. 2:1-5*).

**Acts 18:5-17.** Paul was in Corinth about two years, carrying on a much more extensive work than this brief passage in The Acts suggests. We see here the same opposition from the Jews that Paul faced almost everywhere he went.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be discussed in the circle or group meeting.)

### 1. Rejecting the Holy Spirit today.

Why do we reject the Spirit? What do we fear from him? How do we express our rejection sometimes? (See how it was expressed at Thessalonica and Athens.)

What should our attitude be toward persons who do not become Christians? Evaluate these attitudes:

“That’s their business. Live and let live.”

“They are terrible sinners who must repent of their sins.”

“Let us pray for them.”

A personal question (not to be discussed): If you really listened to the Holy Spirit, what would he change about your life?

### 2. The point of contact in preaching.

Members of this study group are not preachers, but they are the persons to whom preachers speak. They are constantly asking the preacher to “bring the gospel down on our level,” to “speak to us where we live,” to “make the gospel practical for daily living.” In the light of the failure that followed Paul’s attempt to do this with the Athenian philosophers, have we in the congregation the right to ask our ministers to do this kind of thing? Are we unintentionally (perhaps) asking our ministers to weaken and distort the gospel, to make it less harmful to us, to dilute it so we can take it? Would the most practical sermon you ever heard be the Christian gospel? We would probably all admit that the Christian gospel is hard to live by; but would we also admit that it is hard to understand? Are we afraid of it? What is it about it that we fear?

# CHAPTER VIII

## *"Bound in the Spirit"*

**For Background Study: Acts 19:8 to 21:16; Phil. 1:12-26**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 20:17-38**

**Notes for Leaders: page 54**

### THE SITUATION

We are studying the book of The Acts as the record of life in a strange, new world, a world where the Holy Spirit is the chief actor and moving force in the affairs of early Christians. Most of our study has been about one of the Spirit's greatest messengers, Paul of Tarsus.

Paul felt that every step of his life after he became a Christian was taken under the leading of the Holy Spirit. He described this attitude as being "bound in the Spirit." He was literally a slave to Christ, awaiting his Master's bidding. This determined where he went, what he did, how he did it. He abandoned all personal considerations for the sake of the gospel; and this gave him utmost confidence and trust in the grace of God. Paul came as close as any human being to a life lived wholly by the Spirit. (This is a summary of *Acts 20:17-38*.)

The sway of the Spirit over Paul is brought out in the background Scripture for this meeting. Let us look at some of it.

First, going back to a familiar passage which we noted earlier, examine *Acts 16:6-10*. Paul wanted to preach in Bithynia, but he was convinced that the Spirit would not allow him to do this. So he went to Troas, and there received direction from the Spirit to go over to Macedonia with the gospel.

We naturally want to know how Paul was able to be so sure of what the Spirit forbade him to do, and what the Spirit directed him to do. He was, of course, a man of prayer; and God often speaks to us when we are at prayer, turning us away from one course of action and directing us to another. Paul would also make his decisions on the basis of conditions and circumstances that prevailed at the time, and feel that the Spirit was working in him leading him to make that decision. Or he would find the Spirit speaking through the advice of others; this kind of guidance is described in *Acts 21:4*.



“How can I know what the Spirit wants me to do here and now, with this problem, with this decision?” is a crucial question for the Christian. Seeking the Spirit’s guidance in every way possible, a person cannot always be absolutely sure he did what the Spirit was telling him to do. How greatly did his own desires color what he claimed the Spirit said? But each Christian seeks such guidance, knowing that God’s grace will forgive his failures and help him amend the consequences of his mistakes. This is part of being “bound in the Spirit”: trusting not only God’s guidance, but also his grace and forgiveness.

We see Paul acting under the Spirit’s direction in *Acts 19:21* as he makes the decision to head for Jerusalem. This was a courageous decision, because Paul knew very well that his enemies there were plotting to take his life (see *Acts 23:12-15*). Yet he was confident that they would not prevail, even though they might imprison him and beat him, for he believed that the Spirit wanted him to go on to Rome, and perhaps even to Spain. Had it not turned out this way, he would have accepted whatever happened as the will of God. The point was that Paul believed the Spirit was leading him to Jerusalem, at this time, “not knowing what shall befall me there; except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me” (*Acts 20:22-23*).

Here is another important piece of data in our evidence of what it means to be bound in the Spirit. Do not expect an easy time of it! Paul, sincere Christian that he was, had no relief from illness or pain, and he certainly was not spared any degree of hostility and heartache. The Spirit not only gives a person the strength to bear such things, but he may actually send persons into circumstances where their troubles will be multiplied! Being bound in the Spirit is being bound, come what may.

Paul expressed this eloquently in his letter to the Philippians, particularly in *Phil. 1:12-26*. Written years later than the events we are now studying, and from his Roman imprisonment, he tells how being in prison “has really served to advance the gospel.” Then he sets forth his faith that life or death are all the same to him, because he is in Christ. Toward the end of the letter he says, “I have learned, in whatever state I am, to be content.” This kind of confidence comes from being bound in the Spirit.

Often the person who follows the leading of the Spirit is a lonely man, for those closest to him who know him best will try to persuade him to another course of action. This was what Paul faced, as described in *Acts 21:12-15*. This is, of course, a remarkable parallel to Jesus’ similar experience, when he determined to go to Jerusalem and his disciples tried to dissuade him because they feared it meant certain death for their beloved Lord.

Paul, then, was a single-minded man who subordinated all personal considerations to the cause of the gospel. He speaks of this in our passage

for study: note especially *Acts 20:24, 27, 33-35*.

A. M. Hunter, in *Interpreting Paul's Gospel*, gives a very useful summary of what the Spirit means to Paul. He calls the Holy Spirit "Paul's most characteristic teaching," and writes:

"For St. Paul the Christian era is 'the dispensation of the Spirit,' the signs of which are 'freedom,' 'power,' and 'joy.' So he sets the Christian life—its beginning, its middle, and its end—in the context of the Spirit. The condition of the Spirit's coming is 'hearing (the gospel) with faith,' and at baptism upon conversion the believer receives the Spirit as an invisible 'seal.' The church, Christ's body, to which baptism is the door, is the sphere in which the Spirit does his quickening work.

"All Christian skills are *charismata*, 'grace-gifts' of the Spirit. All genuine Christian confessions of one's faith, such as 'Jesus is Lord,' has its source in the Holy Spirit; and if we are sure of God's love to us declared in the cross, it is because of the Spirit 'flooding' our hearts. All true Christian prayer is 'in the Spirit'—when we falter and fumble in our devotions, it is the Spirit who assists us, and when in filial intimacy we cry 'Abba, Father,' it is the Spirit assuring us we are sons of God. All authentic Christian behavior is a 'walking by the Spirit,' as all lovely Christian virtues and graces—from 'love' to 'self-control'—are the Spirit's 'fruit.' When we fight the good fight against sin, the flesh and the devil, our ready and sufficient resource is the Spirit. And if we hope for a life as immortal as Christ's own, our hope rests in possessing the Spirit of him who raised Christ Jesus from the dead.

"Nor is the Spirit some passive and impersonal influence operating in a soulless, mechanical way. The Spirit is active, personal, and purposive power working for Christlike ends, for the Spirit is 'the Spirit of Christ' or 'the Spirit of his Son.' Consider how personal are the verbs used to describe the Spirit's work. The Spirit 'leads,' 'testifies,' 'strengthens,' and 'sanctifies.' Dwelling in human hearts, he 'searches' and 'reveals' divine secrets, and 'intercedes' for us 'according to the will of God.' We may 'grieve' the Spirit as we would a friend; we can 'quench' his flame; but as we 'set our mind on the Spirit,' 'live by the Spirit,' are 'aglow with the Spirit,' we have freedom from the law, the secret of victorious living, and the 'guarantee' of everlasting life."<sup>1</sup>

## FOR HOME STUDY

**Acts 19:8-20.** Paul stays in Ephesus for two years. Notice the term "the Way" as a description of the Christian gospel. This apparently refers to

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<sup>1</sup> A. M. Hunter, *Interpreting Paul's Gospel*, pp. 108-109. The Westminster Press, 1955. Used by permission.

the word of Jesus, "I am the way."

**Acts 19:21-39.** This is one of the significant stories in The Acts. The gospel threatens the economic livelihood of the silversmiths in Ephesus because it turns the people away from the worship of idols to the worship of the one true God. This is a typical effect of the gospel: the worship of God is a threat to all other idolatries, even the idolatry of our jobs and our homes.

**Acts 20:1-16.** With these verses we can trace Paul's journey from Ephesus, into Europe and Greece, then back over the same route on the way to Jerusalem, stopping off at Miletus to counsel with the authorities from Ephesus.

**Acts 21:1-16.** Paul and his companions sail back to Syria, delay for a short time their trip to Jerusalem, and then go to the city "that killeth the prophets," not knowing what to expect but confident that Paul will go on to Rome.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be studied in the circle or group meeting.)

1. What does it mean to be "bound in the Spirit"?
2. Can just anyone seek and find the Spirit's guidance, whether or not he is a Christian? Why is the Spirit given only to Christians?
3. Why is being "bound in the Spirit" a first requirement for receiving the Spirit's guidance?
4. How can we know what the Spirit wants us to do here and now, with this problem, with that decision?
5. How does the Spirit guide a church or a church organization in electing its officers? Are elders in a Presbyterian church called to their office by the Holy Spirit? What do we do to signify this call?
6. What is a Christian attitude toward adversity?
7. What is the difference between an immature and mature faith in God? How does the passage from Philippians illustrate a mature faith?
8. What is the meaning of the Greek word "*charismata*"? Why is the idea expressed in this word an important one for Christian living?
9. How have these studies in The Acts changed or added to your understanding of the Holy Spirit in the life of the church?
10. Describe ways in which the Holy Spirit is working in the church today.



## CHAPTER

# IX

## *"A Man's Foes Will Be Those of His Own Household"*

**For Background Study: Acts 21:15 to 25:27; Matt. 10:34-39**

**For Circle or Group Study: Matt. 10:34-39; Acts 21:27 to 22:3**

**Notes for Leaders: page 55**

### THE SITUATION

Jesus' last days in Jerusalem and Paul's last days in the same city are strikingly alike.

Jesus "set his face to go to Jerusalem," even though he knew his enemies awaited him there and even though his friends tried to keep him from going. It was the same with Paul. Both Jesus and Paul appeared before the Jewish council, the Sanhedrin; both were turned over to Gentiles by their countrymen; both were accused by the Sadducean priests; both were charged with treason against Caesar. Both were victims of mob violence.

It was heart-rending to both Jesus and Paul that their bitterest enemies were their own people. We have seen how strongly Luke emphasizes the Jewish opposition to Paul, and we know from the Gospels what the Jewish leaders thought of Jesus. Yet neither Jesus nor Paul ever renounced or denounced their Jewish heritage or their Jewishness. Jesus wept over Jerusalem, and Paul never lost an opportunity to declare he was a bona fide Jew of the strictest sort, "zealous for God" (*Acts 22:3*).

Because he was a Christian, Paul had to face the violence of those whom he loved, and be cut off from the nation of which he was a proud member. Thus Paul came to understand Jesus' words: "Do not think that I have come to bring peace on earth; I have not come to bring peace, but a sword . . . and a man's foes will be those of his own household." (*Matt. 10:34, 36.*) There is a higher loyalty than wife or husband, than parents or children, than race or nation. It is loyalty to Christ and his Kingdom and Paul learned the cost of such loyalty.

Paul would be the last to allow the enmity of the Jews to lead to "anti-Semitism" on his part. He did not see Christianity as completely casting off the garments of Judaism. He saw it as transforming Judaism, and leading the faith of his fathers to its true fulfillment in the gospel.

The words of the Jews against Paul in *Acts 21:28* provide a convenient

outline to show how Christianity fulfills rather than denies Judaism. They said of Paul: "This is the man who is teaching men everywhere against the people and the law and this place." The Jews knew they were the chosen *people* of God; they knew their *law* was the law of God; and they regarded their *temple* ("this place") as the special dwelling of God, which no Gentile should enter.

Paul did not deny the significance of the nation, the law, and the temple. The chosen people of God is no more a particular race or nation but all those from any race or nation who are called by the Spirit and baptized into the church. The church is the new people of God, the New Israel. The law of Moses was not denied. Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, showed how it was fulfilled in himself; and accepting his sacrifice is accepting his fulfilling of the law for us. The new temple is the body of Christ, the people in whom God dwells. "For we are the temple of the living God; as God said,

"I will live in them and move among them,  
and I will be their God,  
and they shall be my people.'"

—II Cor. 6:16, quoting Jer. 31:1.

We cannot eliminate the Old Testament from the Christian Scripture. It is the record of God in action, preparing the way for the coming of our Lord, and we could not properly comprehend the Christian gospel without it. No one knows this better than Paul—yet he stands before the Roman authorities condemned by his countrymen for destroying the Word of God!

This is the essential truth behind Luke's account of Paul's last visit to Jerusalem. It may be helpful now to indicate in summary fashion what happened there.

1. Upon arriving in Jerusalem, Paul submitted to Jewish rites of purification. It is very difficult to know why he did this, and we cannot say for sure. The simplest explanation is the same as we suggested with Timothy's circumcision: he did not think the issue was worth a battle at this time. (*Acts 21:17-26.*)

2. These Jews stirred up the mob against him, and beat him, so that a cohort of Roman soldiers had to imprison him for his own protection. Paul was given the chance to defend himself before the Jews, but when he spoke of taking the gospel to the Gentiles they threatened him again. (*Chs. 21:27 to 22:29.*)

3. In order to find out what the charge against Paul was, the Romans brought him before the Sanhedrin. Paul's defense of the resurrection divided his enemies. (*Chs. 22:30 to 23:11.*)

4. These Jews took a vow not to eat or drink until they had killed Paul;

but his nephew heard of the plot and reported it to the Romans. They therefore took him in the middle of the night to Caesarea and imprisoned him there, away from the violence of Jerusalem. Then his accusers were summoned to present their case against him, and he was given the opportunity to defend himself before Felix the governor. (*Chs. 23:12 to 24:22.*)

5. Paul was under arrest in Caesarea for some two years, but he was given wide liberty of movement, and he spoke often to Felix about his faith in Christ Jesus (*ch. 24:23-27*).

6. Festus succeeded Felix as governor. The Jews asked that Paul be brought back to Jerusalem, secretly planning to ambush and kill him on the way. Festus, however, required that the accusers come to Caesarea. Before the governor, Paul made his appeal to Caesar, knowing that this would fulfill his expectation and hope of going to Rome. Festus told King Agrippa about Paul, and Agrippa expressed a desire to hear Paul's message. (*Ch. 25:1-22.*)

7. Paul defended himself before Agrippa, after which the king remarked to the governor that the apostle could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar. We studied this defense in our third meeting. (*Chs. 25:33 to 26:32.*)

## FOR HOME STUDY

We suggest that each of the sections indicated above be studied in preparation for the meeting, and in the order indicated. Read also *Matt. 10:34-39*.

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be studied in the circle or group meeting.)

1. When loyalties clash—a consideration of *Matt. 10:34-39*.

Under what circumstances might loyalty to family conflict with loyalty to Christ?

Some churchwomen have a prejudice against the apostle Paul because, they say, he did not like women. They base this feeling on *I Cor., ch. 7*. But is Paul antifeminist? Is he against marriage? The key verse in this chapter is v. 17, "Let every one lead the life which the Lord has assigned to him, and in which God has called him." It is primarily a question of loyalty: accepting the state to which we are called by God rather than rebelling against it. If we think that marriage is in itself superior to singleness, are we not putting the family as an idol in the place that belongs to God?



What would have happened to Paul if he had let his loyalty to Judaism overrule his loyalty to Christ?

2. Jesus as our example.

It is common to think that Jesus is our example in the good moral life he led. But the only place in which he is spoken of in Scripture as our example (*I Peter 2:21*) he is our example in suffering (read vs. 20-25). How was Paul's life patterned after the life of Jesus in this regard? How is ours? Why is suffering a *necessary* part of the Christian's life? What is the difference between just suffering, and suffering for the gospel? (*Phil. 3:10.*)

3. The fulfillment of the law and the prophets in Christianity.

In what respect are Christians "the chosen people"? How are they chosen? What did Jesus mean when he said in *Matt. 5:17* that he "fulfilled" the law? How do *you* come to terms with the demands of the Sermon on the Mount?

Why do Christians need the Old Testament?

Do Christians have a special evangelistic responsibility to the Jews?

What debts do we Christians owe to the Jews?

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## PRAYER FOR THE REDEMPTION OF ISRAEL

"O Lord God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, look in thy mercy on thine ancient people Israel, and take away the veil from their hearts, that they may behold in thine only-begotten Son their true Messiah; that the promises made unto their fathers may be fulfilled unto them, and that in them all the kindreds of the earth may be blessed; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen."— *From Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland, p. 287.*

# CHAPTER X

## *On Goes the Gospel*

**For Background Study: Acts, chs. 27; 28**

**For Circle or Group Study: Acts 28:17-31**

**Notes for Leaders: page 55**

### THE SITUATION

Luke wrote the book of The Acts in Rome some twenty years after the death of Paul in order to describe the expansion of the church from Jerusalem to Rome, under the power of the Holy Spirit. We wonder why the story ends so abruptly, and why Luke did not tell us what happened to Paul and how he died. But he did not. This is perhaps a way of reminding us that, influential as Paul is in the story of The Acts, he is not the chief actor. The chief actor is the Holy Spirit.

William Barclay has expressed this matter very well in his arrangement of The Acts for home study, *The Acts of the Apostles*:

"And so the book of Acts comes to an end with a shout of triumph. In the Greek the words *without let or hindrance* are one word and that one word falls like a victor's cry. It is the peak of Luke's story. . . . At the beginning Luke gave us his scheme of Acts when he told us that Jesus commanded his men to preach in Jerusalem and in Judea and in Samaria and in the uttermost parts of the earth (*Acts 1:8*). The tale is finished; the story that began in Jerusalem rather more than thirty years ago has finished in Rome. It is nothing less than a miracle of God. The church which at the beginning of Acts could be numbered in scores cannot now be numbered in tens of thousands. The story of the crucified man of Nazareth has swept across the world in its conquering course until now without let or hindrance it is being preached in Rome, the capital of the world. The gospel has reached the center of the world and is being freely proclaimed—and Luke's task is at an end."<sup>1</sup>

The last verse of The Acts, then, becomes a kind of door which we open to see disclosed the whole future history and mission of the church.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Acts of the Apostles*, by William Barclay (The Daily Study Bible Series), pp. 212-213. The Westminster Press, 1957. Used by permission.

“Preaching the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ”—that is what the church was doing in the first three decades of its life, and what the church has been doing—with varying degrees of effectiveness—ever since.

The story of the church continues to be a record of the Holy Spirit working in the lives of the persons whom he calls, being hindered by their rebellion and ineptitude, being rejected, yet constantly renewing the church through the commitment and service he awakens in its members. We have what the apostolic church had: the Holy Spirit. We study about the church through the centuries in order to learn how the Spirit has worked in the acts of latter-day “apostles,” from the second century on.

God has never left himself without witness at any point in history. He never will. To believe that the church can ever die is to consider men greater than God. Churches, sects, denominations can fold up; they can also appear extremely successful before the world but be inwardly dead. Yet *the* church, the called people of God, will never die; and what we shall know in eternity will be the church triumphant and perfected, fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.

This is because the gospel goes on. The Kingdom is preached and the gospel is taught through Spirit-led men and despite human weakness. The question for us is simply: Is it going on *through us*? Are we being led by the Spirit to preach and teach, or do we hinder preaching and teaching? Do we receive the Spirit or reject him? Do we feel called to mission? Are we bound in the Spirit? We can take no refuge in the conviction that *the* church will not die, for our particular church could die, or might in fact be already dead and not know it!

No church has the Holy Spirit if it does not have a sense of mission to the new world. A church with a lukewarm sense of mission may well be asked the question that Paul directed to the uninformed disciples at Ephesus: “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed?” And the honest answer of the church officials and members might be the same one Paul received: “No, we have never even heard that there is a Holy Spirit.”

The gospel goes on in different ways in each generation, though the broad terms “teaching” and “preaching” still apply. From the beginning it has gone on through the written word: think of the influence of the written Gospels and Paul’s letters upon the church throughout its history. It goes on in the church’s worship, in the sacraments, in preaching. It goes on in the church’s pastoral ministry of personal concern.

Today we use the instruments of Christian education in home and church, of pastoral counseling, of leadership development, of social action, of ecumenical and national mission, of councils of churches, and so forth. We appear to be well organized for the work of preaching and teaching.



But good organization does not guarantee the success of the Holy Spirit. We need constantly Karl Barth's reminder about the function of the church order and organization: "The task and the significance of church order consists in so uniting the congregation on the human level that it is rendered as free as possible for all that the Lord himself can, and will do, in her. . . . Church order, like the church itself, is not an end in itself. It is man's attempt so to serve God's word in obedience to it that, in the face of the danger menacing the church, the wisest, boldest, and most effective steps are taken to ensure that the immediate meeting and communion of the living Lord Jesus Christ with his congregation shall take place anew. No human effort can ensure this divine encounter. But man *can* clear the obstacles out of the way; and *this* is the purpose of church order."<sup>2</sup>

Each Christian, then, must find the place in church life where *he* may be used as an instrument for transmitting the gospel to his own and other generations. He should see his place and his organization in the terms Dr. Barth has described—as a *means* for the gospel and not the gospel itself. But it is important and necessary to be instruments, good channels through which the grace of God is shed upon human life. This is *our* "apostolic" act, our way of performing acts of contemporary apostles who are under the power of the Holy Spirit.

## FOR HOME STUDY

The story of Paul's journey to Rome can be read at one time, in *Acts*, chs. 27; 28. You may want to follow it on the map in this Guide.

We are naturally curious about what happened to Paul between the end of the book of The Acts and his death, probably in A.D. 64. His letters, some of them written during his Roman imprisonment at this time, give a number of tantalizing hints but never enough to tell us for certain what happened.

A number of scholars believe that Paul was released from prison after two years and made a fourth journey, this time going to Spain, which had long been his ambition (see *Rom.* 15:24). According to this theory, Paul was later recaptured and killed as a martyr, perhaps in Nero's persecution (A.D. 64).

## THE ISSUES ARISING FROM THIS STUDY

(To be discussed in the circle or group meeting.)

1. Do we understand the book of The Acts?

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<sup>2</sup> Karl Barth in *Man's Disorder and God's Design*, Vol. I, pp. 73, 75. Harper & Bros.

Where was the gospel known, by the end of the apostolic period?  
 What does Luke teach us about the Holy Spirit?  
 What does he tell us about Paul and Paul's relation to other leaders in the apostolic church?  
 What impression does Luke give of Jewish and Roman reaction to the gospel?  
 At what points do we need to balance Luke's story with other interpretations from Paul's letters?

2. When does the church today hinder the work of the Holy Spirit?  
 Why does the church so often appeal to self-interest in its promotion of its work? Why does it have to "promote" the church and the gospel?  
 Why do church people resent stewardship sermons and the annual Every Member Canvass?  
 What are "safe" subjects for your minister to preach about? What are some "dangerous" subjects?  
 At what points does the gospel conflict with the standards and practices of "the world"?  
 What organizations in your church are ends in themselves rather than means toward "preaching and teaching" the gospel? In what respect is your circle and Women's Association an end in itself?
3. How is the church an instrument of the Holy Spirit today?  
 What proportion of your church's budget is for benevolences?  
 How many persons have entered the ministry, the mission field, or Christian education work from your church?  
 Do you have a constant struggle to get church school teachers? How adequately do you train the teachers you have?  
 What proportion of the children in your church school come from homes where their parents are not church members? How does your church minister to these families?  
 How does your church interpret the issues of a political campaign to its members?  
 How well do you integrate persons of differing racial and economic position into your church?

This is not a complete list of the questions a church ought to ask in appraisal of its common life. It is merely an indication of the direction in which a church should move as it considers its faithfulness to the gospel today.

# *Suggestions to Leaders*

## ABOUT DISCUSSION

This Guide assumes that Bible study in the circle or group will consist of discussing the situation described in the book of The Acts in terms of the issues which the situation raised for our own day. We study the Biblical situation in order to understand and discuss contemporary issues.

One form of Bible study is to have the student trace the missionary journeys of Paul or give a character sketch of some of the people in The Acts. Such a study is interesting and can produce valuable, useful information, provided it is used to clarify the issues and to let the Holy Spirit speak from the Scripture today. The first without the second is study *about* the Bible, and this is only a small part of Bible study.

No one person however expert his knowledge and eloquent his speech, can study the Bible for anyone else. There is a place for the lecturer; but unless the individual student asks himself seriously, "What does this mean to me?" the Bible is a closed book to him.

This means that *discussion* is the essential method for group Bible study, discussion in which group members share their experiences and insights and help one another face the implications of Scripture for their lives. The leader, then, is a *discussion leader* rather than a Bible scholar or expert; and his or her essential skill is the ability to probe beneath the surface to the heart of the issue.

*Westminster Adult Leader* regularly carries articles on leadership skills which will be helpful to the leaders of circle or group Bible study. In addition, the pamphlet *Let's Discuss It* (PDS, 15 cents) is recommended.

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

The best material I know for an understanding of The Acts is in *The Interpreter's Bible* (Abingdon Press, 12 volumes, \$8.75 a volume). I commend most heartily these essays on "The History of the Early Church" in Vol. 7: Part I, "The Beginnings," by Ernest F. Scott; Part II, "The Life of Paul," by William H. P. Hatch; and Part III, "Paul the Apostle," by Paul S. Minear. (The third essay was reprinted in *Crossroads*, July-Sept., 1956.) The introduction to The Acts itself and the exegesis and exposition of it, are in Vol. 9.

*The Beginning of Christianity*, by Clarence T. Craig (Abingdon Press, \$2.75), is an invaluable textbook on the apostolic church. An atlas of the Bible, such as *The Westminster Historical Atlas to the Bible* (\$7.50) or



the *Rand McNally Bible Atlas* (\$8.95), is very informative. A Bible dictionary, such as *The Westminster Dictionary of the Bible* (\$5.00) or *Harper's Bible Dictionary* (\$7.95), comes in handy. A good one-volume Bible commentary is *The Twentieth Century Bible Commentary* (Harper & Brothers, \$6.95).

J. B. Phillips' *Young Church in Action* (The Macmillan Company, \$2.50) is a translation of The Acts, and has a perceptive introduction to the book. William Barclay's *The Acts of the Apostles* (The Westminster Press, \$2.50) arranges the book for daily home reading and carries comments on the passages. It also has a helpful introduction. The leader could use both of these books to good advantage.

### OUTLINE OF THE ACTS

C. H. Turner, in *Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible* (Charles Scribner's Sons, one-volume edition, \$12.50), divides The Acts into what he calls "six panels, each labeled with a general summary of progress . . . Of these six sections the protagonist in the first three is St. Peter, in the last three St. Paul; and the two halves into which the book thus naturally falls make almost equal divisions at the middle of the whole period covered." Our study picks up The Acts at about the beginning of section (c), so that we deal with one "Peter" period, and the rest with "Paul."

- (a) The church in Jerusalem, and Peter's preaching — summary in *Acts 6:7*.
- (b) The expansion of the church through Palestine — summary in *ch. 9:31*.
- (c) The expansion of the church to Antioch, etc. — summary in *ch. 12:24*.
- (d) The expansion of the church to Asia Minor and Galatia—summary in *ch. 16:5*.
- (e) The expansion of the church to Europe—summary in *ch. 19:20*.
- (f) The expansion of the church to Rome—summary in *ch. 28:31*.

### CHRONOLOGY

Although we cannot be definite about the years and order of events in The Acts, the chronology in *The Westminster Edition of The Holy Bible* is close enough for our purposes.

- Crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus,
- and Pentecost, "birthday of the church" . . . . . A.D. 30
- Stoning of Stephen and conversion of Paul . . . . . A.D. 33 or 34

Paul visits Jerusalem ( <i>Gal. 1:18</i> ).....	A.D. 36
In Antioch, and famine relief to Jerusalem.....	A.D. 44 or 45
Paul's first missionary journey.....	A.D. 48-49
Apostolic council at Jerusalem ( <i>Acts, ch. 15</i> ).....	A.D. 49
Paul's second missionary journey.....	A.D. 49-52
Paul's third missionary journey.....	A.D. 53-58
Paul arrested in Jerusalem.....	A.D. 58
Paul in prison in Caesarea.....	A.D. 58-60
Paul's voyage to Rome.....	A.D. 60-61
Paul a prisoner in Rome.....	A.D. 61-63
Paul released from prison.....	A.D. 63
Execution of Peter and Paul at Rome .....	A.D. 64 or 67
We are assuming that Luke wrote The Acts in Rome some twenty years later, around A.D. 85.	

## LEADING THE DISCUSSIONS

### First Meeting

#### "The Promise of the Spirit"

**Purpose:** To understand that the chief actor in the Biblical drama is God, and in the book of The Acts we see how he acts through the Holy Spirit; to stress that our chief purpose in these studies will be to learn how the Holy Spirit works in the church, so that we may be open to his leading in the church today.

**Preparation:** It is assumed that the members of most circles or groups will not have had this Guide before this first meeting. It would be possible, however, to ask each person to read *Acts, chs. 1 to 9*, before the meeting, and to assign special reports to some in advance of the meeting.

These reports could be in answer to the question, "What did the Holy Spirit do in the earliest days of the church?" Assign one of these four passages to each of four persons: *chs. 2 to 3; chs. 4 to 5; ch. 6; chs. 8 to 9*.

Another interesting assignment would be to have someone study the hymns that are about the Holy Spirit, and report to the group how the hymns describe the Spirit and his work.

In her preparation the leader should be sure she understands the material under "The God Who Acts" and "The Strange, New World" as resource for explaining why we study The Acts and what we hope to accomplish through this study. (See "Purpose" above.) If there are questions in the first chapter of the Guide which she cannot answer, she should consult her pastor and use his library for her preparation.

The Scott essay "The Beginnings" mentioned under "Additional Re-

sources" is helpful on this section of The Acts.

*Discussion Plan:*

1. Distribute this Guide.
2. Discuss the first question, examining the Scripture references.
3. Discuss the second question, following up the Scripture references. Receive assigned reports on this question.
4. Present the material from "The God Who Acts" and "The Strange, New World."
5. Receive the report on the Holy Spirit in hymns.
6. Explain the plan for this study, and emphasize the importance of each member's reading the passages in the section "For Home Study" and participating in the discussion. Bring out the relation between "The Situation" and "The Issues." Make assignment suggested under "Preparation" for the next topic.

## **Second Meeting**

### **"The Working of the Spirit"**

*Purpose:* To see how the Holy Spirit works in a specific situation and the revolutionary way in which the Spirit overcomes deep-rooted resistance to God's purposes.

*Preparation:* In her preparation the leader must be sure she understands the significance of Peter's going to the Gentile Cornelius and the amazement of the Jews that the Gentiles had been given the Holy Spirit. In other words, the leader must understand the issues raised in this chapter of the Guide, and be prepared to push the discussion beyond the prejudices of A.D. 40 to the division among people in and out of the church in this year of our Lord. *Can the Holy Spirit break down these barriers?* If the group does not discuss this question searchingly, it has not studied the Bible at this meeting.

This would be a good opportunity for someone in the group to explore the discussions at Oberlin, in 1957, on the question, "What Is the Nature of the Unity We Seek?" See the article "Officers and Oberlin" in *Cross-roads*, Oct.-Dec., 1958, and the book by Albert C. Outler, *The Christian Tradition and the Unity We Seek* (Oxford University Press, \$3.25). The Oberlin Report (*The Nature of the Unity We Seek*, edited by Paul Minear, Bethany Press, \$4.00) and a study guide to the discussions that took place at this Faith and Order conference (*A Guide to Christian Unity*, by George L. Hunt, Bethany Press, \$1.00) are also available from Westminster Book Stores.

*Discussion Plan:* The leader's task here is to direct the discussion of the



questions in the Guide, and to bring in material from “The Situation” and the Bible passages assigned under “For Home Study” where it relates to the issues that are being discussed and helps to clarify them. It will be best if the leader can draw out this material from members of the group who are expected to read the Scripture passages before the meeting. However, she should be prepared to do this herself if necessary.

The basic pattern is to begin with the questions, examine the Scripture references, and use the material from background reading for resource.

### **Third Meeting**

#### **“Called by the Spirit”**

*Purpose:* To understand how the Holy Spirit called Paul to the service of Christ, and what he did with him, so that we may face what the Holy Spirit requires of us.

*Preparation:* The questions in this section of the Guide relate more to the Holy Spirit and *us* than to the Holy Spirit and Paul. One part of the leader’s preparation, therefore, will be to relate the material under “The Situation” and “For Home Study” to these questions.

The problem for this meeting will be to have enough time to do both: to introduce Paul and to discuss what the Holy Spirit requires of *us*. It may be that for that reason the leader should make a brief, ten-minute talk about Paul before beginning the discussion of the questions. (Of course, if every member of the group has done her homework, she will already have all this information!)

The essays by Minear and Hatch (see “Additional Resources,” p. 48) are excellent for an understanding of the apostle.

*Discussion Plan:* For suggestions on organizing your discussion, see the introduction to this section (pp. 48-50) and the discussion plans for the first and second meetings.

### **Fourth Meeting**

#### **“Called to Mission”**

*Purpose:* To study Paul’s sermon at Antioch in Pisidia in order to know in what terms these early Christians declared the gospel, so that we might know how the gospel should be declared today.

*Preparation:* It is usually interesting to people to trace the missionary journeys of Paul, and a map is provided on the inside back cover of this Guide for that purpose. The journeys are not indicated on the map, in order that the group members may trace them for themselves. You may want to use a different color pencil or pen for each journey.

The leader could take just a few minutes to have a member of the group describe the journey briefly while the rest trace it in their books. The section "The Situation" summarizes the journey. It would be interesting to have special reports on the city of Antioch in Syria, which sent these men on the mission (see Craig, p. 150, or any Bible atlas or dictionary); and on the young man who turned back, John Mark. Barnabas is also worth special attention. Look these names up in a Bible dictionary.

However, it is the sermon that is important, and the issues that it raises for us. An assignment for this discussion might be to have several people examine the sermon topics in the newspapers for the next month (that is, the month before this meeting).

In the meeting itself you might distribute small pieces of paper or 3" x 5" cards and have each person write down the points he would make in his letter to the Jewish person interested in Christianity. (See Question 2 under "The Issues.")

*Discussion Plan:* For suggestions on organizing your discussion, see the introduction to this leader's section (pp. 48-50) and the discussion plans for the first and second meetings.

## **Fifth Meeting**

### **"The Freedom of the Spirit"**

*Purpose:* To understand Christian liberty, as set forth by Paul in the letter to the Galatians, and as established in principle by the Jerusalem council meeting described in *Acts, ch. 15*.

*Preparation:* If the leader is studying William Barclay's *The Acts of the Apostles*, she will carefully mark the difference between his interpretation of *Acts, ch. 15*, and *Gal., ch. 2*, and decide for herself which interpretation is more correct.

This is a theological subject, because the crucial issue of *Acts, ch. 15*, is a theological issue. The leader may not feel equipped to handle the discussion of Question 2 under "The Issues." For simple help we recommend Ch. 3 of *The Way of Discipleship* (Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church U.S.A.), the reading book for adult church membership classes. Further help will be found in Craig, pp. 253-256.

Word study is often a good way to understand difficult matters. The resource *A Theological Word-Book of the Bible* (edited by Alan Richardson) can be consulted for an understanding of these words: "justification," "salvation," "atonement," "reconciliation," "grace," "faith." Each word could be assigned to one person for report.

The leader should read in preparation the whole epistle to the *Galatians*, and *Romans, chs. 2 to 8* (especially *chs. 5 and 6*).

The *plan for discussion* will require first a sketch of the situation and then consideration of the issues.

### **Sixth Meeting**

#### **"Receiving the Spirit"**

*Purpose:* What does it mean to become a Christian? In this meeting the group will seek an answer to that question by studying about several persons who became Christians during Paul's second missionary journey.

*Preparation:* The leader might assign reports on these subjects to various members of the group: the congregation at Philippi (see any introduction to the letter to the Philippians, or a Bible dictionary; read Philippians); Timothy, Lydia, Aquila and Priscilla, Apollos. The group could begin tracing the second missionary journey on the map in this book.

On Bonhoeffer: there are introductions telling the story of his witness in his books *Cost of Discipleship* and *Letters and Papers from Prison*.

Be sure to explain to the group that we are studying the same background Scripture in these two meetings, but we are looking for different things each time.

Begin with the reports, then discuss the questions.

### **Seventh Meeting**

#### **"Rejecting the Spirit"**

*Purpose:* To see why and how we do not listen to the Spirit when he speaks.

*Preparation:* A very useful extra resource for this study would be the book *Modern Rivals to Christian Faith*, by Cornelius Loew (Layman's Theological Library, The Westminster Press, \$1.00). It would be most interesting to read this book and find counterparts today to the people who rejected the Spirit in these chapters of The Acts. A chapter from the book is in *Crossroads*, Jan.-March, 1958, issue. On the work at Corinth, see *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9, p. 240.

Summarize the material under "The Situation" and then discuss the issues.

### **Eighth Meeting**

#### **"Bound in the Spirit" "**

*Purpose:* To see in the life of Paul what it means to be completely under the control of the Holy Spirit.

*Preparation:* The leader's chief problem with this topic will be to make the transfer from Paul's experience to ours. A person is inclined to think



either that Paul achieved a degree of life in the Spirit which is impossible for the rest of us to experience, or that life in the Spirit must be expressed in a kind of outward piety which many of us find offensive. There are people whose glib and easy talk about being “led by the Spirit” irritates others.

The leader ought, therefore, to emphasize that *forgiveness* is also made known to us by the Holy Spirit. Paul was a human being like the rest of us who because tired, lost his temper, was impatient at times, and with whom the Spirit had to struggle to make him do God’s will. Luke, in The Acts, is inclined to idealize Paul; yet between the lines of his letters we can see the real man coming through. Like any good preacher or writer, he writes about his own concerns. *Romans 8:26*, for example, is an autobiographical verse.

Another difficulty is that the Holy Spirit is not recognized as a vital force in Christian life today. We do not talk much about the Holy Spirit. The strange world of the Spirit which we have seen in The Acts is not our world. This is not because the Spirit has been absent from our world but because we have not recognized his work when it has appeared. The leader, therefore, should put special emphasis on the last two questions under “The Issues.”

This may be a good time for a summary. Have seven persons prepared to give a one-minute summary of the teaching about the Holy Spirit that has been central in each of the previous topics.

## **Ninth Meeting**

“‘A Man’s Foes Will Be Those of His Own Household’ ”

*Purpose:* To consider the cost of Christian discipleship, and the relation between Christianity and Judaism.

*Preparation:* The leader should have clearly in mind what happened to Paul in Jerusalem and Caesarea. The story is exciting and easy to retell. But the group will miss the point of this part of Paul’s story if the members are satisfied simply to review what happened. We have tried to suggest that for Paul what was at stake was loyalty to Christ without disloyalty to God’s deeds in Israel before the Christ came. This fundamental issue is stated for us in our “Purpose” and in the points raised under “The Issues.”

## **Tenth Meeting**

“On Goes the Gospel”

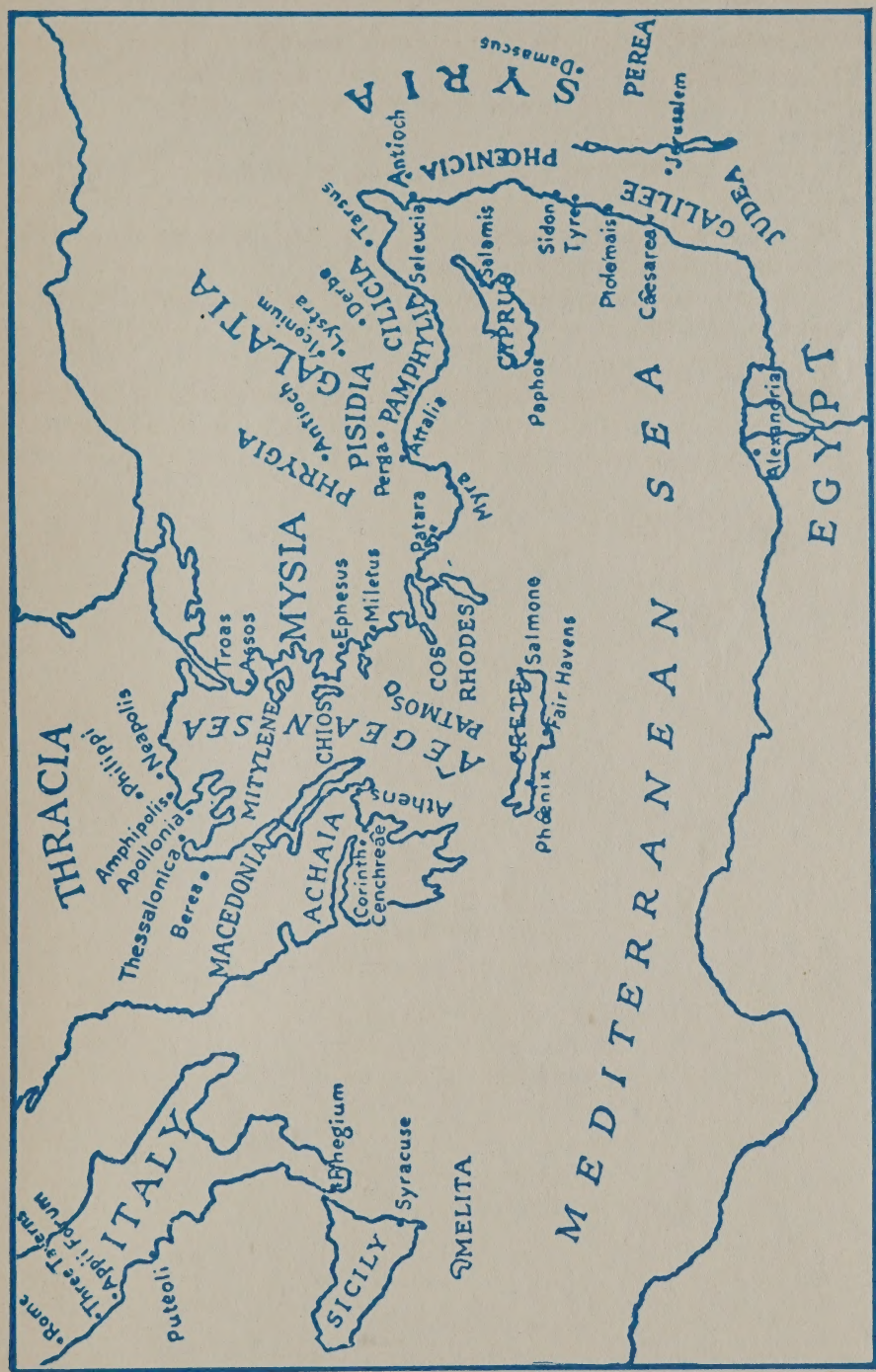
*Purpose:* To summarize our study of The Acts, and to determine in some measure how our church today is carrying on its witness to the gospel.

*Preparation:* The leader can describe Paul's trip to Rome quickly, and have the group trace it on the map. The leader may also want to comment briefly on the various theories about the last years of Paul's life. (See *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. 9, pp. 349-352.)

Most of the time for Bible study should be spent discussing the questions under "The Issues." The first group of questions under the heading "Do We Understand the Book of The Acts?" are based on the purposes or aims of Luke in writing this record. See pp. 7-9 of this Guide.

You may need to get some information from your church records to answer some of the other questions. Do this before the meeting (or assign this to someone for report).

Do not evade any hard questions in your appraisal, but avoid the impression that the work of the Holy Spirit can be evaluated statistically or by "yes" or "no" answers totaled and compared.







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